

The temporary and typological potential for new interaction and publicness

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Abstract

As a portable typology, pop-up stores appeared in China in 2006 and quickly spread to increase opportunities for meeting up and growing fashion and brand activities. Most are located in the interior of shopping centres or on streets with retail shops. However, they are generally not considered as public spaces or as positive urban elements. Residents and urban agencies are inclined to perceive them to be temporary and purely functional places that serve commercial interests and lack social and spatial possibilities. This research, first, aims to provide a classification of the typologies of pop-up stores through a literature review and a field survey in Shanghai. Through the observation and documentation of people's behaviours in selected pop-up stores, the research explores whether such shops' temporality, their limitations regarding times of operation, and their spatial configurations have affected people's interactions and activities. We argue that they concurrently offers a new sense of publicness among people immersing themselves in these spaces and places inside and outside pop-up stores depending on their location. In addition, it innovates and advances the understanding of these portable commercial areas by considering their social dimensions and relation to the larger context. This research further investigates how the temporality and flexible needs of the spaces have influenced their design. By studying Shanghai's pop-up stores as representational, the study aims to shed light on the design strategies of retail pop-up stores to strengthen the positive impact of new publicness brought by such innovative temporary public spaces.

Keyword: publicness, China, pop-up store, portable typology

Introduction

Taking representative pop-up spaces in Shanghai as examples, this research classifies pop-up stores according to their relationship with their surrounding urban context and developed a model for evaluating their publicness. In view of the results, this paper re-examines whether emerging urban pop-up stores can be used to prompt new forms of urban publicness able to reconnect and reactivate defective public urban spaces compared with bottom-up pop-up spaces. The paper also reflects on which pop-up stores' design strategies and associated forms of space management in urban China can better promote and sustain the public vitality of pop-up stores in general.

Background

As a type of portable space, pop-up stores differ from traditional forms of public space by affording temporary usage and flexible handling. However, pop-up spaces in China are primarily commercial shops and booths operated in the short term, and thus generally not considered to be positive urban spaces with good potential for facilitating public activities or public communication. Often, pop-up stores in China suddenly

appear on the street or inside a commercial centre, last from a few days to a few months and primarily attract consumers with new, time-limited services. Afterwards, they are disassembled and relocated before consumers tire of them. According to RET (2017), pop-up stores began to appear in China in 2006 and entered a stage of explosive growth. Owing to its leading position in the fashion and other commercial industries, Shanghai is usually the top choice for all kinds of brands to pilot pop-up stores. The data in the RET's (2017) report indicate that there were approximately 460 pop-up shops in Shanghai in 2017—nearly 20 times as many as in other cities on average—all primarily located within large business districts and on the streets. Seemingly driven by commercial logic only, that type of temporary public space may influence the people who access it and their understanding of public space for public good.

Understanding how China's pop-up stores and urban pop-up spaces requires understanding where pop-up stores are currently positioned in China and how they have developed. Pop-up stores are primarily led by local designers who learned the practice of pop-up shops from well-known European and American brands (Ret, 2017). Pop-up stores primarily focus on commercial sales and brand promotion and are dominated by enterprises or individual businesses. In fact, pop-up stores are a typical example of hunger marketing that responds to China's consumer culture. In China, where the population is large and the emerging middle class is growing, such time-limited storefronts provoke a fear of missing out and create excitement and exclusivity for customers (Kidder, 2020). Although some designers have sought to shift the purpose of pop-up stores from sales to design or cultural promotion, their attempts have not gained much traction. Nevertheless, in recent years, as the quality of life in China has improved, people's demand for pop-up shops in addition to sales has increased significantly. A survey conducted by Sootoo Research Center (2018) revealed that people are interested in the innovative spatial design of pop-up stores and the potential to interact with other consumers. In turn, consumers hope that pop-up stores can create more spaces able to interact with them and generate social spaces such as bars and galleries. Thus, whether users realise it or not, they have a demand for flexible public spaces where they can interact and socialise.

China's urban environment faces a corresponding problem amidst the process of urbanisation: low-quality public spaces. Under the strict requirements of China's urban management system, pop-up stores on the city scale are primarily undertaken by enterprises for selling and/or advertising, although a few not-for-profit pop-up spaces serve as exhibitions for the purpose of cultural communication. This paper investigates the possibility of their becoming public urban spaces that intentionally or unintentionally contribute a new form of publicness to urban contexts that is able to mitigate the current lack of interaction and communications in such spaces. In that light, *publicness* in this paper primarily refers to the degree of accessibility and inclusiveness for all people and all activities at the social and spatial levels.

Methodology

The research involved fieldwork in selected pop-up stores located in Shanghai. Pop-up stores were classified, and the spatial characteristics of each type of pop-up space and their relationship with the surrounding environment were summarised. Observation and immersion were performed in four of the pop-up spaces, all located on the same street, by focusing on how they are designed and how they influence people's behaviour. Pop-up spaces' publicness was observed with a focus on three dimensions: people's behaviour in the space, the space's relationship with the urban context and the space's sociocultural influence.

Creating models for assessing pop-up publicness requires adjusting for the influence of existing models for assessing the publicness of public urban spaces, most of which have primarily been generated in Western contexts. The model for evaluating the publicness of pop-up space presented in this paper primarily refers to two quantitative scoring models. One is the scoring index designed by Németh and Schmidt (2007) to evaluate 12 publicly accessible spaces in the centre of Manhattan, New York. The researchers argued that the safety of public space is directly related to its publicness, such that an excellent public space balances freedom and security. The other one is the star evaluation model proposed by Varna and Tiesdell (2010), which includes five dimensions: ownership, control, civility, physical configuration and animation.

Following a field survey on public space at four sites in Shanghai: Playing Wood Forest, Shanghai; Museum Town, Dare to Be a Friend and Weekend Market (Bund Finance Center). Playing Wood Forest (Shanghai Times Square) is located at the junction of Huaihai Middle Road and Xizang South Road in Huangpu District, Shanghai. Museum Town (Bund Origin) is located on Yuanmingyuan Road, Huangpu District, Shanghai. The pop-up space starts at Beijing East Road in the south and ends at South Suzhou Road in the north. The space is distributed linearly along the street, with a total length of approximately 200 metres. On one side are residential areas and historic buildings; on the other is the site of the former British Consul's residence. Dare to Be a Friend (HKRI Taikoo Hui) is located in the inner north square of Taikuhui Business District, at the intersection of Shimen 1st Road and Nanjing West Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai. The pop-up space is distributed east to west along Wujiang Road and extends to the north square at the shopping mall entrance and inside the shopping mall. The Weekend Market is located in the Bund Finance Center, Fengjing Road, Huangpu District, Shanghai.

Based on the observations made during the fieldwork of the actual conditions of the pop-up stores in Shanghai and after considering the two existing reference models created for the Western context mentioned, a model for assessing the publicness of the pop-up spaces in China was developed. In the model, factors influencing publicness are divided into three groups: (a) rules and guidance, (b) surveillance and policing and (c) form and configuration. Some of the factors are common to traditional public spaces. For example, rules and guidance includes signage announcing the space's function. Surveillance and policing, by comparison, includes safety equipment (e.g. fire extinguisher), placement in a commercial area, security cameras, security personnel and service personnel who control the space. The third group, form and

configuration, is subdivided into two aspects: the macro (i.e. with the urban context, which primarily refers to access and territoriality) and the micro (i.e. interior and surrounding space, including design, image and human involvement). The macro aspect encompasses visibility, dynamic interface, connectivity (e.g. sidewalks and in-store corridors) and enclosure; whereas the micro part encompasses design and image, the microclimate (e.g. greening and canopy), manual maintenance and cleaning, artistic and cultural visual enhancers, media for disseminating information to the public and the presence of a sponsor or advertisement.

The new elements of pop-up spaces evaluated, summarised primarily in light of the field survey, are primarily in the form and configuration group. From the macro perspective, the elements include entrance accessibility, because most pop-up space is commercial and therefore benefits from open access; and corresponding area, because if the pop-up space can interact with the surrounding space, it has more potential to invisibly and spatially expand its influence. Among factors of restricted use, areas of restricted or conditional use and borders relate to the space's non-entity domain; those elements may suggest that the space does not welcome everyone. From the micro perspective, by contrast, the temporality of activities and the space's limited duration are unique impact factors of the pop-up space. The richness of time-limited activities and an appropriate duration can arouse people's interest in visiting the space several times.

Each impact factor was quantified into a specific number or percentage and divided into three levels (i.e. 0, 1 and 2) according to the intensity observed in the field survey. Last, the score in each field was analysed and compared. Four selected urban pop-up spaces were scored and compared.

Results and Discussions



Figure 1. The site plan and the photos of the cases selected for the fieldwork. These photographs and diagrams were taken and made by Zixuan Zhang.

Although mainstream pop-up stores remain focused on promoting commercial brands or selling products, some pop-up spaces have consciously or unconsciously nurtured some open public spaces and provided

some social functions. Of the three primary types of such spaces—indoor pop-up stores, free-standing stores and outdoor pop-up spaces—this paper addresses the outdoor type given its focus on exploring publicness in public urban space. Beyond that, outdoor pop-up spaces are primarily divided into four types: semi-enclosed, parallel, penetrative and inserted. After allocating scores and doing the calculations for the four selected cases, the results were analysed sequentially according to the classification of impact factors in the assessment model.

Rules and guidance as well as surveillance and policing

Because the rules and guidance group and the surveillance and policing group are related, they were analysed together. As for space management, although various security measures (e.g. surveillance cameras and security personnel) were depreciatory items because they restrict the entry of more people, relatively complete space management measures can afford people a sense of security and contribute to the stability of public space. As mentioned, pop-up spaces, as public spaces, need to strike a balance between freedom and safety. All four spaces performed well in terms of security measures, space maintenance and signage to guide people in using them. Signage about the function of the space in all four spaces and other suggestive signs were apparent, and security personnel and security cameras were common as in most pop-up spaces, because people therein are usually in dense crowds and mobile. There were also many auxiliary staff, including guides for the theme exhibition area and cleaning staff who manage garbage sorting and maintain the space's orderliness.

Access and territoriality

The performance of the spaces in terms of their spatial openness was ambiguous. The four spaces have attempted to ensure access to everyone without any restrictions, avoided solid partition walls and sought to be eye-catching. At the same time, fences and floor decorations have been used to distinguish the interior and the surrounding environment, thereby alerting visitors to the invisible boundaries of the spaces, which is somewhat unavoidable due to their commercial nature.

Design and image

As mentioned, compared with permanent public spaces, pop-up spaces can provoke people's fear of missing out. Therefore, the richness and duration of time-limited activities are pivotal to encouraging people to linger at the spaces and revisit multiple times. Dare to Be a Friend and the Weekend Market, which earned the highest scores for design and image, had nearly maximised the advantage of temporary occupancy. The Weekend Market was observed to primarily use outdoor performances and various theme parades to attract people to participate in activities at different times. The pop-up space also cooperates with various themed storefronts inside the shopping mall to hold outdoor or indoor activities, including yoga classes, darkroom experiences and photography exhibition, at different times. That strategy has invisibly expanded the use and

scope of influence of the pop-up spaces, increased the richness and complexity of their themes and encouraged people to gather for social activities and interact with strangers in teaching and/or cooperative activities.

Human involvement

Regarding opportunities for people to communicate and cooperate in the spaces and the flexibility of the spaces to be transformed according to users' needs, two aspects deserve mention: the capacity to allow people to participate in and experience different activities. For example, every venue in Museum Town was observed to have steps or small platforms to climb and devices on different scales for people to interact with, including oversized teacup-shaped seats. Dare to Be a Friend, meanwhile, has a seesaw and a small theatre for children to explore.

Conclusions

According to the evaluation and summary, urban pop-up spaces currently in Shanghai, as a representative area of China, have followed various creative spatial design strategies to encourage different people to use them in different ways, which can improve the publicness of the spaces. In sum, the four pop-up spaces have created new forms of publicness at both the urban and spatial scales. First, the analysis of access and territoriality revealed that the appearance of the pop-up spaces in different places around Shanghai is not random, aimless or without far-reaching social influence. They are reconnecting spaces that activate urban areas and urban space and at once enhance social vitality. The results also revealed that the four pop-up spaces have relatively excelled in accommodating different people. Meanwhile, contractors have made innovative use of the temporary nature of pop-up spaces to design narrative spaces and activities and to create opportunities for public encounters and communication. In terms of security, a reasonable number of security and auxiliary staff were present to ensure the cleanliness and order of the space. The commercial pop-up spaces have thus attempted to balance the freedom and security of the temporary space, whether consciously or unconsciously, thereby creating a new form of fluid, dynamic publicness that is unavailable in traditional permanent public urban spaces. The design of the four pop-up spaces, however, was not observed to promote the autonomous participation of users. The origin of the bottom-up participatory design concept for temporary spaces dates back to the 1960s in the West. However, people's initiative to participate in the space design and transformation, which commonly appears in Western public urban spaces, has not yet appeared in China's pop-up spaces.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1. Features encouraging use

Features	Approach	Scoring criteria
Signage announcing space Function	Rules and guidance	0 = none present 1 = one small sign 2 = one large sign or two or more signs
Tips for usage	Rules and guidance	0 = none present 1 = one but not obvious 2 = many and obvious
Visibility	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = not visible in more than two directions from 100 metres away 1 = visible in one direction from 100 metres away 2 = visible in more than two directions from 100 metres away
Dynamic interface	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = one or two places of business every 100 metres and a single type of business, with a passive primary facade without any detailed decoration 1 = three to nine places of business every 100 metres, with two to three types of business; half of the facade is the blind area, and the building is of ordinary quality, with some detailed decoration or various types of business in only one direction 2 = more than 10 businesses every 100 metres and in various types; the facade is not negative, no blind area exists, and the building is of high-quality material and has exquisitely detailed decoration
Entrance accessibility	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = access is restricted to a limited number of people or conditions 1 = one or several entrances through mall doors or gates only 2 = more than one entrance open to all
Connectivity (e.g. sidewalks and in-store corridors)	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = only one-way access 1 = access in two directions 2 = access in more than two directions
Corresponding area	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = independent space that is not associated with surrounding functions 1 = one surrounding brand or a corresponding functional space 2 = more than two interrelated spaces that form a functional zone
Circulation	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = only one functional area or no clear circulation 1 = at least one primary type of circulation but not suitable for staying

		2 = clear and easy to wander and invites lingering
Elements extended to the surrounding environment	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = no extension at all 1 = some coherent elements or simple decorations in the adjacent area 2 = elements cleverly and fully extended to the adjacent area
Utilisation of surrounding facilities or space	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = no use at all 1 = use of one facility or space (e.g. fountain or greenway) 2 = use of more than two facilities or spaces
Microclimate (e.g. greening and canopy)	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = no shelter and an indoor greenery 1 = small area of shelters with some greenery 2 = large area of shady overhangs and trees, etc.
Maintenance and cleaning	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = Basically unclean and with many destroyed elements 1 = Half of the area is unclean and with partly destroyed signs 2 = Clean and tidy, without any destroyed signs
Artistic or cultural visual enhancers	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = No artistic, cultural or visual enhancers 1 = one or two small installations, sculptures or fountains, etc. 2 = A large, obvious landscape or art installation
Media for disseminating information to the public	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = none 1 = one or two small screens 2 = one or more medium-sized or large screens or performance stages
Food vendors	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = unavailable 1 = one type of basic retail kiosk 2 = more than two types of retail kiosks or one larger grocery or coffee stall
Temporal richness of activities	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = only one theme (i.e. sales only) 1 = multiple themes but all day 2 = both all-day and time-limited activities
Duration of the pop-up store	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = more than 1 month 1 = less than 3 days 2 = 3 days to 1 month

Visible sets of rules posted	Rules and guidance	0 = none present 1 = one sign or posting 2 = two or more signs or postings
Enclosure	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = no walls 1 = walls lower than the height of the human body and higher than but not obstructing sight and passable in one or both directions 2 = walls higher than the height of the human body that obstruct sight and passable in one or both directions
Areas of restricted or conditional use	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = no restricted area 1 = one small area restricted to certain groups of the public 2 = large area for consumers only or several smaller restricted areas
Border	Access and territoriality (Macro: with the urban context)	0 = no clearly delineated boundaries 1 = visually or materially differentiated by floor colour and/or upholstery, etc. 2 = clearly delineated boundaries (e.g. fences)
Presence of sponsor or advertisement	Design and image (Micro: interior and surrounding space)	0 = none 1 = one medium-sized or some small advertisements 2 = one or more large billboards
Placement in a commercial area	Surveillance and policing	0 = none 1 = in a commercial area with maintenance services only 2 = in a commercial area with maintenance and security services
Security cameras	Surveillance and policing	0 = none 1 = one 2 = more than two fixed cameras or active surveillance camera equipment
Security personnel	Surveillance and policing	0 = none 1 = one 2 = more than two uniformed or plainclothes security guards
Service personnel who control the space	Surveillance and policing	0 = none 1 = one 2 = more than two